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Articles in Today's Clips Monday, November 27, 2006

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<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
*Child Abuse/ Neglect/Protection	2-12
*Adoption	13-15
Homelessness	16-26
Juvenile Justice	27-32
Foster Care	33-36
Food Assistance	37-47
Child Care	48-49
Volunteers	50-51
Charities	52-55
Native Americans	56-57
2-1-1	58
Welfare Reform	59



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Published November 27, 2006

When caregivers kill: Stress, psychosis can transform parents, experts say

A child's trust betrayed

By Kevin Grasha and Christine Rook
Lansing State Journal

The primal drive to nurture and protect one's children typically is ingrained. The survival of the species depends on it.

Yet in the news there are stories of parents who either abandon their future or actively prey upon it - beating, torturing and destroying the children in their care.

Why?

Why did Lisa Holland, the Williamston woman recently convicted of killing her 7-year-old son, abuse him for years and ultimately lash out at him with a hammer?

Why did Cynthia Daniel allow the man who burned and fatally beat her toddler to remain in her Lansing home?

"Only someone who is severely mentally ill could do something like this," clinical psychologist Daniel Blake of Oakland County said, speaking in general terms. "I mean beyond severe."

In each death, there was an abuser and a parent who let it happen.

Psychosis, stress, hopelessness, depression, childhood trauma and substance abuse are among the things experts say can transform parents and caregivers into monsters.

"The child represents something to them that they find intolerable in themselves," Blake said.

That is different than the temporary anger all parents experience, Blake explained. Criminally abusive parents are severely disturbed - dysfunctional sometimes to the point of being deadly.

During his wife's trial, Tim Holland described her intense hatred of Ricky, saying she often referred to the boy as "little bastard."



(Photo by Lansing State Journal file photo)
Ricky Holland's loss ignited the community, who searched for the missing 7-year-old for days. On Tuesday, his mother Lisa Holland will be sentenced to life in prison without parole for his murder.

Getting help

- Are you or someone you know struggling emotionally as a parent? Call the state's parent help line at (800) 942-4357. The 24-hour hotline also accepts tips on child abuse.

On Tuesday, Lisa Holland will be sentenced to life in prison without parole. Her husband will serve 30 years to 60 years in prison for his role in the death of their adopted son Ricky.

Cynthia Daniel, 31, will spend five years to 15 years in prison for involuntary manslaughter and child abuse. Her former boyfriend, 32-year-old Samuel Courtland of Lansing, was found guilty of first-degree murder and will be sentenced in December to life in prison without parole.

Maltreatment

About 50 children die each year in Michigan from abuse and neglect, said Karen Stock, a spokeswoman for the Department of Human Services. In 2002, for example, 52 Michigan children died from maltreatment.

In almost three out of four of those cases, a biological parent is to blame. Overwhelmingly, the mother is the culprit, but it is unclear whether that is because women are more likely to commit this type of abuse or because they have more access to the children.

"We are programmed to form attachments to other human beings," said Elizabeth Seagull, an Okemos psychologist, explaining the primal drive that pushes most parents to protect and nurture their children.

Without that drive, a parent might be prone to treat his or her child as an object - something without feelings.

How does a human become so emotionally damaged as to lose all empathy?

Sometimes an adult who has suffered abuse copes with that trauma by shutting off his or her feelings.

"You become numb to that kind of suffering," Seagull said.

Pushed into a rage, experts say, such a parent could beat that child, feeling the whole time as if it were all just a movie. Only after the parent "woke up" would there be feelings of remorse.

No one knows whether Lisa Holland felt remorse, but a letter presented at her trial suggested she might have experienced regret.

The letter she wrote to a fellow Ingham County Jail inmate read: "It was an accident. I didn't mean to."

But as to why she killed Ricky, Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency told jurors during Holland's trial: "I do not know why Ricky died," he said. "I cannot prove why."

Shutting down

Shutting down is a defense mechanism that experts also see used by parents who allow other people to abuse their kids.

There's no way of knowing whether shutting down was how Cynthia Daniel allowed Samuel Courtland to kill her 2-year-old son, Jalyn. Prosecutors said the boy was "beaten to a pulp" over the course of several months.

The concept of shutting down does, however, offer a glimpse of how it might have happened.

"You totally disassociate," Okemos psychologist Claire Fleet Berkman said. "You're just not there. You're just so terrified of the other person."

Daniel testified when she confronted Courtland once about whipping Jalyn with a belt, he responded, "You can take the blows for him."

Tim Holland admitted allowing his wife to abuse Ricky for years, saying he was afraid of her.

Preying on children

In some cases, there is a perfect storm of factors that can cause a parent or caregiver to prey upon a child.

Two days before Jalyn Daniel died, Cynthia Daniel and a friend went to a Mount Pleasant casino, leaving Courtland to care for several children, including Jalyn.

Courtland, who was supposed to work an early morning shift at a local McDonald's, violently beat the 2-year-old in the kitchen that night, according to testimony at his trial.

Jalyn's older brother said he could hear the smack of a belt from an upstairs bedroom.

Assistant Prosecutor Bill Crino, in his closing arguments, said Courtland could have been frustrated and angry about being left alone with the children.

"People unload on children because they are tired and pissed off," Crino said. "It's clear he [didn't] want to be stuck in the house with those kids."

Regardless of what causes parents and caregivers to snap, society should accept at least some responsibility, experts say.

No one stepped in to rescue Ricky or Jalyn or to give their families the help they needed.

Could the deaths have been prevented had a relative, acquaintance or state worker intervened? Maybe.

"It's a breakdown of family," Berkman said. "It's a breakdown of friends, of community support."

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Published November 24, 2006
[From Lansing State Journal]

Friday's letters to the editor

Sentences not equal

Could someone please explain why Tim Holland received a sentence of 30 to 60 years, but Cynthia Daniel only got 5 to 15? It appeared to me that they were both guilty of the same crime. They both testified against their mate or boyfriend. They both sat back and watched their child being brutally tortured, resulting in their death. Is it because our court system believes that an African-American child isn't as valuable as a white child? They should have both received 30 to 60 years at the very least.

John G. Theisen
Dimondale

Priorities skewed

The fact that the Holland case cost \$18,000 is peanuts compared to the bill that the taxpayers will be paying for them to be in jail. Let's say Timothy Holland only serves a mere 30 years for his son's murder and Lisa Holland lasts only 40 years of her life sentence. Taxpayers can look forward to spending more than \$2.1 million.

If it costs between \$25,000 and \$30,000 to house a prisoner per year (with free health care) how can we (with a clear conscience) only give schools \$3,000 per student per year ?

Douglas Schafer
Lansing



Thanksgiving Eve a heartbreaker for child victims at court sentencing day

Thursday, November 23, 2006

By Steven Hepker

shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

Sentencing day Wednesday before Circuit Judge Chad Schmucker was particularly heartbreaking for children let down or abused by misbehaving adults.

High on the offender list was Gary Zander, a 69-year-old ex-Marine and mason who molested two girls repeatedly. Schmucker and Assistant Prosecutor Allison Bates said the details were shocking and revolting.

"Even if you planted the flag on Iwo Jima, you should go to prison for the rest of your life," Schmucker scolded him.

Because the victims' family did not want a trial, prosecutors agreed to a plea deal that gave Zander a maximum 365 days in jail. He pleaded no contest to assault with intent to commit criminal sexual conduct.

"This does not sit well with me," Bates said, indicating the alternative was to force the girls to testify and risk acquittal.

Just a notch less revolting, Schmucker said, was Miles Wallace-Sterner.

Investigators said Wallace-Sterner, 22, was baby-sitting a mentally challenged 5-year-old girl while her mother and her boyfriend were out smoking crack cocaine. They knew he was a convicted sex offender, Bates said.

"They were more concerned about feeding their cocaine habit," Bates said. They caught Wallace-Sterner sexually assaulting the girl on their couch.

Unlike the two victims of Zander, the 5-year-old cannot communicate.

Defense attorney Michael Dungan offered a positive note: "If there is any saving grace, it is that the girl was removed from the home."

Schmucker doubled the guidelines, sending Wallace-Sterner to prison for 7-15 years. He said it is unfair only in the sense that Zander should have gotten at least that much.

At least another 10 kids were left in the lurch Wednesday by mothers immersed in the criminal lifestyle.

Among them was Carrie Williams, a 24-year-old admitted cocaine addict who gave birth to her sixth child on Aug. 18. Before that, Schmucker had jailed her "as long as possible" to protect the fetus from habitual drug use.

Williams has resisted drug treatment in the past and has lost her children. The Department of Human Services took her last child at infancy.

"She is in need of extensive rehabilitation," defense attorney Susan Dehncke said, adding that Williams "self-medicates" for depression.

Schmucker gave her the maximum under the guidelines, 270 days in jail.

"It is sadder for your children than for you," Schmucker said.

Brandi Warner, also 24 and the mother of four, was sentenced to 10 days in jail for stealing cash and credit cards from her aunt's purse. The aunt, a retired teacher, told of leaving her purse on her desk for 30 years, and not once did any of the nearly 4,000 teenagers she taught steal from her.

Warner's 88-year-old grandfather is now afraid to leave home, fearing that Warner and friends will ransack his place for drug money, the aunt said.

Schmucker ordered Warner to stay clear of her aunt and grandfather, and from any family functions.

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[Return to regular web page](#)



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November 24, 2006

Abuse suit cites child services

Adoptive mother of Taylor boy severely burned in 2001 alleges authorities ignored warnings.

Paul Egan / The Detroit News

The adoptive mother of a Taylor child abuse victim has filed a federal lawsuit alleging officials failed to act on complaints that could have prevented a severe assault.

Anthony Soderberg was 3 years old in 2001 when he was severely burned in a bathtub, suffering third-degree burns over much of his body, according to a complaint filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Detroit.

John Hastie, 28, who was the boyfriend of Anthony's natural mother, Renee McCormick, is serving a five- to 15-year prison sentence for first-degree child abuse in connection with the incident, according to the lawsuit and Michigan Department of Corrections records.

Tracy Soderberg, who is Renee's aunt and has adopted Anthony, alleges that child protective service workers were repeatedly warned Hastie was abusing Anthony but failed to act.

She names Wayne County as a defendant in the action but county officials say they have no record that Anthony was ever in the county's care.

They speculated the county was named as a defendant in error and child protective service workers from the state, not the county, were involved.

James M. Brady, Soderberg's Southfield lawyer, said the lawsuit was drafted by another attorney and recently turned over to him and it is possible the complaint needs to be amended.

The lawsuit alleges that in January 2001, about two months before Anthony was burned, his grandmother, Lynn Ladd, anonymously reported to child protective service officials that Anthony had severe bruises all over his body and his arm had been broken twice in the previous two months. Ladd identified Hastie as the abuser, according to the lawsuit.

An Oakwood Hospital worker made a complaint the same day after noticing Anthony's arm had been broken twice, the lawsuit alleges.

Despite that, nothing had happened by Feb. 9, when Ladd called officials again, the suit alleges. A case worker visited Feb. 13 but officials closed the file after determining Anthony had not been abused, the complaint says.

The case file was re-opened in response to pleas from Anthony's relatives but officials showed gross negligence and did not take steps to assure his safety prior to the March 10, 2001, assault, the suit alleges.

State Department of Human Services officials said they had not been served with a lawsuit and had no comment.

You can reach Paul Egan at (313) 222-2069 or pegan@detnews.com.

[Return to regular web page](#)

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[Back](#)

Article published Nov 25, 2006
Baby's injuries set off abuse inquiry
6-month-old boy in critical condition in Ann Arbor hospital

By DANIELLE QUISENBERRY
Times Herald

COTTRELLVILLE TWP.- Detectives from the St. Clair County Sheriff Department are continuing to investigate a Wednesday incident of suspected child abuse that left a 6½-month-old boy in the hospital.

Sheriff deputies discovered the boy had been hospitalized Thursday afternoon when they were asked to help Child Protective Services remove two other children from the infant's home in the 800 block of Oak Street in Shangri-La Village Homes, police said.

Detectives interviewed people in Cottrellville Township Thursday night and into Friday morning, when they released details about the incident, said Sgt. Jerry Bassett.

Detectives were not available for comment Friday.

The baby, whose name has not been released, was in critical condition Friday evening at a University of Michigan Health System hospital in Ann Arbor. The baby is in the pediatric intensive care unit.

He was transported via helicopter to the Ann Arbor hospital from St. John River District Hospital in East China Township.

Police said a relative drove the baby to the hospital Wednesday with "several severe injuries." After the child was stabilized, he was flown to the Ann Arbor hospital.

Further details about the case have not been released.

It's unknown how long the investigation will continue.

[Print Page](#)

Three arrests from meth lab

Friday, November 24, 2006 9:49 AM EST

CASSOPOLIS - On Nov. 21 at 3 p.m., investigators from the Cass County Drug Enforcement Team acting on a citizen's tip responded to a residence in the 10000 block of Mann Road in Newberg Township, Jones.

The remnants of a methamphetamine lab were discovered, along with methamphetamine, marijuana and firearms.

Investigators determined that the occupants of the trailer had manufactured methamphetamine in the residence earlier in the day.

The suspects then attempted to destroy the laboratory and chemicals prior to the detectives' arrival.

Arrested were two occupants of the house as well as a third person for various narcotics charges.

A charge of child endangerment was also added to the residents' charges as there was an 11-year-old child found at the residence as well.

The child was turned over to Department of Human Services personnel.

All of the subjects were lodged in the Cass County Jail to await arraignment.

If anyone has further information on this or any other crime contact the Cass County crime tipline at 1-800-462-9328.



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Published November 24, 2006

MSU student's appeal pulls heartstrings

Senior's letter for PR class wins award, donations

By Chris Andrews
Lansing State Journal

Kelly Hollingsworth already believed in the cause - saving children and comforting families that lose them at infancy.

Request resonates for local group

Here are some excerpts from MSU senior Kelly Hollingsworth's winning fundraising appeal for the organization Tomorrow's Child:

- "Last year in Michigan, more than 1,000 babies died before they reach their first birthday. With your help, we can change these alarming statistics."
- "Because you care about babies, we ask for your help. Your donation will be dedicated to all our children - those we love and cherish today, those we have lost, and those yet to be born - and to the important work of helping heal families who live with the grief of an infant death."

Her mission was to find the words to move others to give to Tomorrow's Child, an agency based in Lansing that reaches out to those families and seeks to prevent sudden infant death syndrome.

"This organization has such heartfelt stories that I cry sometimes at work just dealing with it," said Hollingsworth, a Michigan State University student who is interning with Tomorrow's Child.

Hollingsworth used one of those stories - sharing a mother's pain of loss and the gratitude for support - in her fundraising pitch for a contest/assignment in her public relations techniques class.

It began: "I wish I didn't need to write this letter. It would mean I had not lost a child to sudden infant death syndrome."

The 40 students in professor Richard Cole's class selected Hollingsworth's letter as the best effort this week.

Tomorrow's Child was a winner as well. The 40 students each kicked in \$10, and Cole gave \$200 to donate \$600 in response to the winning appeal.

Hollingsworth, 22, is a senior from Chesterton Ind., majoring in advertising and public relations. She is planning for a career in health care public relations, perhaps working for a hospital.

Cole said people are flooded with requests to contribute to good causes, and the challenge for groups seeking donations is to grab people's attention.

"It's not uncommon to get a hundred fundraising appeals in the course of the year," Cole said. "At some level, something that you read causes you to separate out the one that you give money to from the one that you don't."

Hollingsworth followed the personal story with statistics illustrating the scope of the problem and the impact of Tomorrow's Child's efforts.

"It resonated with me," Cole said.

"It was a strong emotional appeal that was supported by a very good statement of the facts."

Hollingsworth recently was awarded a scholarship by the Detroit chapter of the Public Relations Society of America.

"She is really quite a remarkable young lady," Cole said.

Contact Chris Andrews at 377-1054 or candrews@lsj.com.

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[\[Back\]](#)



Arms open for kids needing adoption

Monday, November 27, 2006

By John Agar

The Grand Rapids Press

After raising eight children, Ned and Rinda, in their late 50s, did not think they could adopt the two foster children they came to know while driving a church bus Wednesday nights.

But they became very attached to the children while trying to find them a home. At church, they asked everyone: Can you adopt these kids?

"One day, I just said, 'I think it should be us,' " Ned said.

"Me, too," Rinda replied.

Now, after adopting the children earlier this year, they cannot imagine life any other way. The children -- a 10-year-old girl and a 12-year-old boy -- are among 50 older children who find homes in Kent County every year.

Statewide, they are among 2,550 children placed into adoptive homes from the foster-care system for the fiscal year ending Sept. 30. About 6,200 children are in the foster system, with 4,500 hoping to be adopted.

Last Tuesday, many adoptive families, courts and adoption workers celebrated "Michigan Adoption Day," hoping to draw attention to the adoption process and remind people that thousands of foster children need homes. Kent County holds its celebration next month, with courtrooms decked out for Christmas -- some judges in Santa outfits.

Across the nation, children 8 and older, particularly those with siblings, are among those hardest to place, Kent County adoption specialist Sandra Recker said.

"But, it's not impossible," she said.

Recker believes no child is unadoptable -- they just have not found families yet. Her heart breaks for children who become adults without being adopted.

"If Johnny is not adopted, where does he go for Christmas? As an adult, who's his family?" Recker asked.

Ned and Rinda, who live in the Grand Rapids area and asked that their last names be withheld for safety reasons, said the children are a blessing.

With their youngest in his third year in college, they never imagined adopting. Then they met Billy and Tanya, who were removed from their biological family.

"This is what the Lord wanted us to do," the mother said.

Once they made the decision, they talked to their older children. They hoped for support, but not all were thrilled. One said they were "nuts."

Then, they met their new brother and sister.

"We just fell in love with the kids," said Scott, a Kent County sheriff's deputy. "You know what? They are family."

His 33-year-old sister told her parents: "I always wanted a sister."

The adult children agreed if anything happens to the parents -- he's 58, she's 59 -- they would take in their new siblings.

Ned and Rinda knew raising the younger children would not be easy, but they have been pleasantly surprised. Billy has cognitive difficulties, and both had fallen behind in their education. But both have shown strong improvement with school work.

One of the biggest struggles is convincing the children they have a home, and a family, forever.

On Easter, after hunting for eggs, Billy asked if they would be around for the next Easter. Everything is new to the children: riding the couples' horses, going to the mall, swimming in a lake.

Billy said he likes his new parents. He likes math, and spelling, and has a "cool teacher." Friday nights are his favorite.

They have pizza and pop and watch movies.

Tanya loves her horse, Gus. She loves her new brothers and sister, too. She is especially glad to have her brother with her.

She's younger, but, "I look after him."

Send e-mail to the author: jagar@grpress.com

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THE DAILY Reporter

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Judge denies motion to step down from case

[Print Page](#)

By Roland Stoy-Staff writer

COLDWATER — Probate Judge Fred Wood has declined to excuse himself from a case regarding a potential adoption matter involving supporters in his re-election campaign, he said Wednesday.

Last month, the Branch County prosecutor's office filed the "motion and affidavit to disqualify," with assistant prosecuting attorney Terri Norris noting the proceedings of a case involving civil neglect dating back to March.

It said the foster care couple "informed and advised the Department of Human Services that they actively endorse the incumbent judge in the probate court and have assisted in his campaign for re-election. These activities include television commercials, endorsements and written correspondence for publication."

Norris said she filed the motion following a meeting with DHS officials, but Wood said he had the support of the DHS, and the DHS did not comment on the matter.

"If this were not an election year, this would not be a problem," Norris told The Daily Reporter, adding that a decision issued by Judge Wood might later be appealed on the basis of his relationship with the couple seeking to adopt the child, and the child would again be in "limbo."

A hearing on parental rights is scheduled for Dec. 1.

Wood declined comment on his decision to not excuse himself from the case except to say he is going by court rules and established criteria "on what judges should do."

"I followed (established) court rules on the case and reached that decision," he said.

Chief assistant prosecuting attorney Ken Stecker, who was in court for the decision Tuesday, said "If you look at the big picture objectively here, you have a biological mother who potentially may have her parental rights terminated by this judge, who thereafter may allow for the adoption of this mother's baby by individuals who were more than mere supporters in his re-election bid.

"There's the realistic possibility that another court down the road, reviewing this matter, may have concerns about whether it was fair and just for this judge to remain in this case."

Wood was successful in his campaign to remain on the probate bench.

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Debate over best way to help homeless people

BY CHRISTY ARBOSCELLO

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

November 26, 2006

On any given day, there are nearly 5,000 homeless people in Detroit, nearly 1,000 in Macomb County and about 1,300 in Oakland County.

And the dreary economic forecast has some anticipating a rise in the displaced population.

There is a debate about the best way to help those thousands. Some homeless aid workers discourage one-on-one assistance like the help Terry Oplinger gave Arthur Doctor, saying that contributions of time or money to established organizations are safest and the surest way to know that your donations are being used to help others.

"As it gets colder, the need for clothing is going to increase," said Carrie Zarotney, director of communications for Common Ground Sanctuary in Oakland County. "The need for food, I think, is continuous."

But Paul Toro, a psychology professor at Wayne State University and researcher on homelessness, said while volunteering through an agency is commendable, it can limit the impact you make.

Toro said the risk in helping someone is that the help won't work. "But if you don't take the risk, the help won't be any good," he said.

Oplinger wouldn't have it any other way because his bond with Doctor runs deep and allows him to watch the once-homeless man flourish.

"I really believe that people in Arthur's circumstances, if they just had someone there to show them the way, then eventually they find the path," he said.

Toro noted that even for some who find housing, it's inevitable they return to the streets.

"It's to be expected that some number will relapse," he said.

CHRISTY ARBOSCELLO

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Homelessness in Northern Michigan: Real or Myth?

BY FRED GRAY NEWS-REVIEW STAFF WRITER

More than 400 people experience homelessness in Charlevoix and Emmet counties at some time during the course of each year, and hundreds more live doubled-up in the homes of family and friends, or are at imminent risk of homelessness, living in substandard or overcrowded housing they cannot afford.

These conclusions exposing the vulnerable underbelly of what is otherwise a prosperous and beautiful area are highlighted in a new study commissioned by the Continuum of Care, a collaborative group that represents 19 organizations in Emmet and Charlevoix counties that are working to alleviate homelessness.

The study, undertaken by Lorraine Manary, a community planning specialist based in Boyne City, is a watershed event for the two-county community, according to Jamie Winters, chairperson of the Continuum.

The study was prompted by a shift in philosophy and initiatives of the state of Michigan, which requires communities to develop 10-year plans to alleviate homelessness if they are going to compete for state grants.

At a two-day Homeless Summit held in Lansing last month, the state announced the simultaneous unveiling of 60 community commitments to 10-Year Plans to End Homelessness, making Michigan the first state in the nation to have every square mile covered by a 10-year plan.

"We are part of that effort," Manary said. "And it's major."

Manary attributed the impetus for Emmet-Charlevoix 10-year plan to a change in philosophy from "job first" to "housing first" and its proponent, Michael DeVos, the new director of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA).

DeVos, no relation to gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos, spearheaded a similar effort as head of Maine's housing authority.

At the Lansing ceremony DeVos was praised by U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director Philip Mangano "for his dauntless commitment to disturbing the status quo of homelessness in two states."

Under DeVos the state is making available \$2 million each in second-round funding for the chronic homeless and domestic violence housing initiatives, \$3 million for homeless youth housing, and \$7.5 million for a homeless families with children initiative.

Public awareness vital

Winters said she hopes the study will raise the awareness in the community of homelessness.

"There has been a gap in understanding of homelessness in the area and I hope this will raise people's compassion," she said. "Our immediate goal is awareness. That is an essential first step in the process of finding solutions to the problems.

"We need to get everybody involved in saying this is unacceptable and do everything possible to deal with it."

Winters said one measure that underscores the breadth of poverty in the area is the fact that over 10,000 people, or about 10 percent of the population base, were given food last year by Manna, the community-supported organization based near Harbor Springs.

"If it wasn't for Manna these people may be choosing between rent and food, and contribute to the homelessness," Manary said.

"A large part of our population is the working poor," said Kathy Hart, Manna's executive director. "A lot of people are just a paycheck away. These are probably the people showing up at Manna."

Hart said a few of those who pick up food at one of the agency's 38 distribution centers in the two counties are living in their cars.

"They don't want you to know that they have no job or a place to stay," she said.

Hart said she helped edit Manary's study and vouches for its accuracy, especially now that schools are working to identify homeless students and work to stabilize their lives.

Mary Goddard, consultant who serves as the homeless liaison to the Char-Em Intermediate School District, said that last year 357 children in Emmet, Charlevoix and northern Antrim counties were identified as homeless at some time during the year.

“Most were ‘doubled up’ with relatives after a parent loses a job,” she said. “Our goal is to stabilize their lives. Once they are considered homeless, our goal is to keep them in one school for the entire year.”

“Using federal Title I funds we provide gas cards to the mothers so she can drive them to school, and we provide them with school supplies and clothing. Often the only thing the kids can count on for stability in their lives is the school,” Goddard said.

Upstairs downstairs

Winters said there is a large dichotomy between those who work in the service industry and the growing number of wealthy retirees who populate the area, especially in and around the cities, raising real estate values beyond the reach of most area workers.

She said the low pay is inherent in the service economy and is something that is unlikely to change.

“Our next goal will be trying to get more permanent support of housing and more transitional housing, and we are now digging into grants,” she said.

Winters said the area is fortunate to have a lot of human service agencies committed to helping people.

“The downside is we have a variety of challenges, many that are not totally unique to our area. For instance, our job base is in Petoskey and Charlevoix but our affordable housing is in Pellston, Levering and East Jordan. That is a huge part of what plays into homelessness,” she said.

Winters said permanent support for affordable housing is a major goal identified by the study.

“It's do-able, and we have a group that's committed to achieving it. We will work with developers on it, and the community will have to stand behind the effort,” she said.

Winters said members of the Continuum meet once every two months, to review progress toward goals and to identify new problems as they arise. “We are constantly working - communicating, advocating and referring clients,” she said.

Initiative for teenagers

One member of the Continuum is Fred Mulhauser, probate judge for both Emmet and Charlevoix counties, who focuses on cases involving child neglect, delinquency and foster care issues.

“In these cases homelessness is a serious issue and a considerable obstacle to the child's success,” Mulhauser said. “We have kids who might be 17 or 18 now and are no longer on probation. They may have rehabilitated themselves but do not have a stable place to go home to. And whether they succeed or not may depend on if they have a place to live.”

“A home is the hub of your personal wheel: If you don't have a reliable safe place to live, how are you going to keep yourself together? How can you do anything?” Mulhauser asked. “We also have cases where we have to place kids in foster care because their parents don't have a place live.”

He said kids without homes often don't have the ability to focus on the healthy parts of their lives, and end up in emergency rooms or in the criminal justice system.

Mulhauser said he is actively exploring establishing “transitional housing” for teenagers between 16 and 20. The housing, new to the area, would be staffed overnight by adults, and have rules and curfews.

“But they would be capable of independent living as fully functioning citizens,” said Mulhauser.

“The important thing to realize is these kids are here anyway. They are in our community, and whether they become productive citizens depends on us. They could go either way.”

Mulhauser said Manary's study and the coordination by the Continuum is highly positive and not found in every county.

“In most communities the groups are separate, doing their own thing. This is a big step forward. We are talking to each other and trying to respond to problems by coordinating our efforts.”

Support for adults

The Nehemiah Project in Petoskey, supported mainly by churches, individuals and businesses from as far north as Drummond Island in the

Upper Peninsula south to Norwood Township in Charlevoix County, offers homeless men and women spotlessly clean and comfortable temporary housing in inconspicuous, middle-class environments.

Michael and Gale Walker operate separate houses for a total of 18 men and women. The houses are staffed by “innkeepers,” or volunteers, overnight and must be vacated by the residents during the day.

“The men's house has been running at full capacity for over a year,” Michael said. “The economy is not helping, and jobs are hard to find.”

As a result, he said, the average stay lasts from 45 to 60 days.

The Walkers refer qualified residents, once they get a job, to local agencies that can pay the first month's rent and a security deposit, neither of which have to be repaid.

Michael said that typically his guests, who range in age from 18 to 70, need housing because they lost their job, are going through a divorce, or have made a series of bad lifestyle choices, often involving alcohol or drug abuse.

“We let people know what the resources are, including health care clinics. We have a good support system for people in the area,” Michael said.

“We also offer spiritual guidance, which is part of making a lasting change,” Gale added.

Manary's conclusion

“Part of the key to making this all work is the support, participation and involvement of our local governmental agencies, led by our county commissioners,” Manary said.

Emmet County commissioners have signed a resolution of support for the creation of the 10-year plan to end homelessness, but the Charlevoix commissioners have yet to sign on.

Manary's study can be viewed at www.char-em-hscb.org.

Continuing Care ...

Members of the Charlevoix Emmet Continuum of Care, working to alleviate homelessness in the two counties:

Charlevoix Emmet Human Services Coordinating Body (parent organization)

Charlevoix-Emmet Department of Human Services

Petoskey Club - North Country Community Mental Health

Nehemiah Hospitality House

Salvation Army

Manna Project

Northwest Michigan Human Services Agency

Northern Homes Community Development Corporation

Char-Em United Way

North Country Community Mental Health

Petoskey-Harbor Springs Community Foundation

St. Francis Xavier Church

Boyne City Housing Commission

East Jordan Care and Share

Charlevoix County Community Foundation

Women's Resource Center of Northern Michigan

Boyne Area Ministerial Association

Good Samaritan

Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District

Fred Gray can be contacted at 439-9374, or fgray@petoskeynews.com.

Housing First to find permanent homes for 50 families

Sunday, November 26, 2006

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT
News Staff Reporter

A weekly interview on a topic in the news, this week with Gary Bell, executive director of SOS Community Services.

SOS helps homeless families find housing, train for jobs, and get health and child care. A pioneer in offering shelters for families, SOS operates a transitional shelter in which 60 families at any given time are housed in various units it owns or leases. The agency also is starting a new initiative, called Housing First, that will put 50 families into permanent, rather than temporary, housing, then provide additional services to those families for up to two years.

Q: Tell us about SOS Community Services' new housing initiative.

A: It's called SOS Housing First. It's a model that isn't original with us, but began elsewhere in the country. Its been around several years, and a growing body of research has been demonstrating its effectiveness. It's been endorsed by the National Alliance on Homelessness and vetted by the Washtenaw Blueprint to End Homelessness. More explicitly, it is part of the Washtenaw Housing Alliance's 500-unit plan to create 500 more units of affordable housing in this 10-year period.

The challenge in traditional shelter programs, in which families stay up to three months and then move on, is that the period that they're in a shelter essentially prolongs their experience of homelessness. Because they are not in full control of their lives, they can't really feel secure in their housing. Housing First turns that around, and says let's get folks immediately into permanent housing, where they can stay as long as they want to stay, and then provide services that increase the chances they can stay there.

Q: How did this initiative get started?

A: : We decided to create the SOS Housing First proposal, to house 24 families a minimum of 24 months, and give them the services they needed to stay there. Just as we started to share that proposal with the larger community ... (the Michigan State Housing Development Authority) MSHDA came out with a notice (Sept. 29) of funding availability for the housing portion.

Q: How will it work?

A: SOS will house 40 families using the model designed in the demonstration project and IHN (the Interfaith Hospitality Network) plans to house 10 families. IHN currently provides housing relocation through the FSN (Family Support Network, a collaboration of eight nonprofits in Washtenaw County). They help folks get from shelter into permanent housing. We're going to build on that, recruit landlords, do inspections, meet MSHDA requirements, then we'll provide case management and services.

MSHDA calls it the Campaign to End Homelessness. Every community in the state is to have its own 10-year plan. (Washtenaw County was) the first in the state to come up with blueprints; we're a model for the state.

Q: How much money are we talking about?

A: This particular chunk of money will provide up to \$1 million for the region for family initiatives, for youth, domestic violence and homelessness. Our region is nine counties. We're hoping \$600,000 of that will come to Washtenaw County just for family housing. That's a big bite, but our region only includes two big urban areas, Lansing and Ann Arbor.

We'll find out at the beginning of December. But it's just for housing, and for two years only. And we'll need funding for the services on top of that.

Q: And where will that money come from?

A: The community.

Mainstream services have pledged to help in some fashion. I don't know exactly how much is on the table. The Washtenaw Housing Alliance is going to try to raise some private funds, and SOS has some existing funds I hope to convert. But we need to raise significant money on our own.

Q: How much do you need?

A: SOS alone would have to raise an additional \$600,000 above what we normally do.

It's difficult for folks who aren't involved in homelessness to realize families that are homeless cost a lot more than individuals. An individual may have more intense needs, but a lot can be addressed through Community Mental Health and substance abuse programs. Families are dealing with poverty, and the programs for them are more scattered and intermittent.

Q: What services do homeless families need?

A: A case manager works with each family to connect them to mainstream resources. It might be Community Mental Health, or work force development.

Then we bring in our employability workers and children's services workers to help the family address the other issues. "What do I need to do to increase my income?" Maybe "I need to get my GED, or some courses to get my associate's degree, or even finish a bachelor's, so that I can pursue this particular vocation because I've got some talents there."

The children's services workers also meet with each family, and each child. There might be some trauma due to homelessness; that they slept in the back seat of the car ... or they saw somebody beating up their mother, or there might be substance abuse ... and the child is witnessing that or is a victim of that.

It might be other services in the community, or it might be a matter of helping a family adjust the way they do business internally, with the idea that the child will then grow up to be more self-sufficient and much less likely to become homeless.

These are the services we provide currently. With Housing First, we will provide them once the family gets in permanent housing, rather than while they're in a shelter.

Q: How many families are homeless in Washtenaw County?

A: : We're not sure. The first six months this year, there were 50,000 people homeless in Michigan, and 56 percent were families. At SOS, we serve about 9,000 people a year who are at risk of homelessness or are homeless. We have 900 families a year just through SOS.

Q: So how much of a dent can 50 families in Housing First really make?

A: Not a big one, but it's big for those 50 families. For our 40 families, we anticipate 100 children. That's 100 children who might be moving from an aunt's house one week, to a friend's house, to sleeping in a car next week, with no sense of permanence in their lives. ... What Housing First will do is help 100 of those children every year get into permanent housing with their own beds, their own safe place.

Susan Oppat can be reached at soppat@annarbornews.com or at 734-482-1166.

MORE THAN AN ACT OF KINDNESS: Perfect stranger transforms a life

Starting with \$2, will to help, he gets homeless man on feet

BY CHRISTY ARBOSCELLO

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

November 26, 2006

They passed him like a street sign every day.

Out of fear or apathy or cynicism, people drove on past the scraggly hobo who treaded Hall Road amid a backdrop of Clinton Township boom and business.

And then something unexpected happened on a frosty winter day nearly three years ago -- someone stopped to offer a couple bucks to Arthur Doctor, 41, who had been collecting bottles to get by.

He didn't know it at the time, but that simple act of kindness would eventually change his life -- and the life of Terry Oplinger, the man who decided he had to do more than give Doctor the two measly bucks in his wallet that day in December 2003.

How it all started

After Oplinger, an automotive engineer from Clinton Township, met Doctor, he promised himself that if the opportunity arose to do more, he'd seize it. It came a couple weeks later when he saw a young couple buying Doctor dinner at a local Boston Market.

So began a project to get the homeless man back on his feet.

It wouldn't be easy. Doctor had a deep mistrust in authority, had battled drug addiction and was partial to his transient lifestyle. But Oplinger would not give up.

Progress in the beginning was slow and came in the form of new clothes, the first haircut in 22 years and weekly meals that served as strategic planning sessions and pep talks.

The first challenge -- Doctor's appearance -- was resolved with a trip to BoRics in 2004, where he reluctantly had 5 inches chopped from his unkempt mane. While he has taken many steps since then on the road to recovery and stability, none have led back to the barber.

Finding a steady job was another priority. PCS Co. in Fraser offered Doctor a position refinishing metal parts for tooling after the Free Press ran a story two years ago on the two men. The staff there recognized Oplinger's name because his son worked there at the time.

But joining the workforce required Doctor to quit drugs for good and shelve his inclination to quit when things got rocky. He almost stormed out after a run-in with a supervisor, but Oplinger was there to encourage him to tough it out.

"I said 'We're already into this effort, so let's make a commitment,' " he recalled.

And with the stakes laid out for him, Doctor simply stopped abusing drugs and, by all accounts, has stayed clean for almost three years.

Then there was the matter of getting Doctor off the streets.

Thanks to donations from Oplinger's friends and family, Doctor has a furnished, one-bedroom apartment in Sterling Heights. He bought a small freezer on his own, hauling it up two flights of stairs.



Two years ago, Terry Oplinger, left, stopped to give Arthur Doctor, who was homeless, a few dollars on Hall Road in Clinton Township. That simple act of kindness turned into an effort to get Doctor on his feet with a job, a car, an apartment and better clothes. Doctor now helps Oplinger around his house. (ROB WIDDIS/Special to the Free Press)

Ways to give a hand

- Community Housing Network is seeking volunteers. Anyone interested can call 248-928-0111, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays.

- To get involved in the nonprofit Homeless Action Network of Detroit, also known as HAND, call 313-365-2273 anytime.

- Common Ground Crisis Line offers help for those in need and gives referrals to shelters in metro Detroit 24 hours a day. Call 800-231-1127 anytime.

- The Neighborhood Service Organization has a 24-hour walk-in center at 3430 Third Ave., Detroit.

MORE THAN AN ACT OF KINDNESS: Perfect stranger transforms a life

Since he was homeless for so long, he is still learning how to keep the place tidy and comfortable.

For more information, call
313-832-3100 anytime.

Oplinger compares it to how 18-year-olds are when they first venture on their own. Only his pal is in his 40s.

Hard work, huge changes

Since meeting Oplinger, Doctor has added a part-time job at Friction Control in Sterling Heights. And he's made enough that he recently applied his hard-earned money to replace the 1994 Ford Escort Oplinger bought him for \$1,500 with a 2006 Pontiac Vibe.

With more to offer, he longed to help his two nieces and rekindle his bond with his mother. He reached out last year to the family members he had lost touch with -- even giving his niece driving lessons.

Robin Williams, Doctor's older sister, said until he called, she hadn't heard from him in five years and didn't know he was living on the streets.

"It's kind of upsetting speaking about all the stuff he went through and he never called," she said in tears Wednesday. "He just didn't want any of us to see him like that. He couldn't come around the family as far as he felt. He got so down."

Today, she and their 71-year-old mother, Inez, have peace knowing that he is doing well. And they're thankful for Oplinger.

"I never met this man, but just from speaking to Arthur, he kind of ended up filling in a spot," Williams said. "He really never had a father figure in his life."

But Doctor is quick to downplay his own achievements.

"To me, success is not anything related to money," he said. "I'm glad that I'm surviving the way that I'm living now," but, he adds, "it's a big struggle."

The hurdles, though, don't prevent him from dreaming of helping others. He hopes one day to save enough to buy housing, refurbish it and offer it to low-income tenants.

Early hardships

Doctor's misfortunes began as an infant, when, his sister said, he had low oxygen levels in his blood, a condition often referred to as blue baby syndrome. He had severe convulsions and needed blood transfusions, she said.

At age 4, his father was shot and killed. His mother raised her three children alone and managed apartment buildings.

Meanwhile, Doctor bounced from school to school, attended high school near relatives in Washington, where, he said, he experimented with drugs. When he returned home to Michigan, he continued to smoke marijuana and use cocaine.

According to state and court records, he served 3 1/2 years in prison on drug charges until his release in 1991, then spent two more years on parole.

After his release, finding regular work was tough. He held several temporary jobs, mostly in factories.

Things slowed down when he suffered a knee injury and eventually, he wound up spending his days collecting bottles from garbage cans outside restaurants and stores, lugging them in a large sack. He passed his nights bundled inside two sleeping bags beneath cardboard or in a friend's Detroit apartment along the Cass Corridor near where he grew up.

"I'm in this position not for any particular reason," he said during a 2004 Free Press interview. "It became so much easier to do it this way."

He added, "Most people are working over half the time just for their homestead. I'm less controlled by the government ... because their system is designed to enslave people for money."

His opinions haven't changed, but he sees the perks in living off the streets now.

"I'm playing the game a little differently," he said.

A big push in a big way

The father of three grown children, Oplinger is thoughtful, patient and a consistent force in Doctor's life. He believes it's extremely difficult for

people to turn their lives around without guidance.

"It's like saying to someone who has depression, 'Snap out of it,' " he said.

But, by reinforcing the positive, ignoring the negative and constantly showing he cares, Oplinger has been able to steer Doctor in the right direction.

"I'm proud of him like he's my son," Oplinger said. "He's kind of rough around the edges, but you know, he's determined."

The transformation is obvious when you look at him. On a Saturday morning late last month, Doctor's previously tattered layers of clothes were replaced by an aqua button-down, black jacket, pants and shoes. He still prefers to keep his hair long, nearly reaching his elbows, but it's clean.

And when he drove to Oplinger's home that day, he arrived with a beverage from a fast-food restaurant -- a seemingly simple thing that reflects a drastic lifestyle change.

He points out though that even when he was searching for cans, he wasn't looking for an escape from homelessness. But he said he knew living his philosophy of treating others as he wished to be treated would bring him something good.

That's why Doctor tries to repay Oplinger by doing repairs on his home during the weekends.

"He's gave me a big push for helping me survive in a big way," Doctor said of Oplinger. "He put himself on the line, more or less."

Contact **CHRISTY OYAMA-ARBOSCELLO** at 586-469-8085 or arboscello@freepress.com.

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Complexities vast for young offenders in their sentencings

Of The Oakland Press

What is society to do with a 16-year-old who shoots another teenager while arguing over a girl and appears to have been raised helping adults peddle dope?

Is he to be locked up for a while to keep society safe, or should he be helped with training or counseling to give him a chance to contribute to society?

Prosecutors said Deonte London belonged in prison, having committed an act that endangered lives. He was on probation and almost 17 years old when he was charged as an adult with assault with intent to commit murder for shooting a 19-year-old in the leg in July on a Pontiac street.

No one else was hurt, and the victim survived with only his leg injured. London pleaded guilty to a lesser charge, assault with intent to do great bodily harm. If sentenced as an adult, London would likely have served less than two years for a minimum term and up to 10 years for the maximum, according to sentencing guidelines.

His defense attorney, however, argued that the opportunities available in the state juvenile system would ensure that the teenager gets an education, learns a skill and develops into a person who will be less likely to get into trouble later and more likely to be productive.

The decision between an adult and a juvenile sentence came down to Oakland County Circuit Judge Steven N. Andrews last month, who insisted upon hearing from experts in both systems about what options existed for London, who lives in Pontiac.

Seven years ago, Oakland County's youngest murderer faced a similar situation.

For Nathaniel Abraham - who as an 11-year-old had killed a passer-by with single shot from a rifle in Pontiac on Oct. 29, 1997, for which he was convicted of second-degree murder two years later - the decision had his life in the balance.

In the end, Oakland County Chief Probate Judge Eugene Arthur Moore sided with rehabilitation and hope, sending Abraham, then 13, into a juvenile facility until he turns 21, which is now a mere two months away. No matter how Abraham performs in the system, his freedom is guaranteed when he turns 21 in January.

To be sentenced as an adult could have brought up to life behind bars for a boy who could not even comprehend the eight years he faced in the juvenile system.

Compromised sentence

But the case of London did not attract the scrutiny and spotlight of Abraham's, because London's crime was the lowest in severity in which prosecutors could seek to put someone under 17 into prison.

However, the issues debated are the same: What best serves society in sentencing a young but violent offender?

In the end, the judge compromised, leaving both attorneys pleased.

On Oct. 12, one day after hearing arguments from Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Tare Wigod and defense attorney Michael McCarthy, Andrews ruled that London belonged with other prisoners his own age, sending him to a juvenile setting - but also keeping the case for his close inspection.

"It is in the best interest of society and for the protection of the public that (London) receive the intensive treatment and services available in the juvenile system," Andrews said in issuing his opinion.

The judge ordered London to be sent to the W.J. Maxey Boys' Training School near Ann Arbor until his 21st birthday. Abraham spent about seven years there and is now in a Bay City halfway house, working in retail and saving his money as he awaits total freedom.

Andrews will review London's progress every six months, holding onto the right to imprison him if he fails to improve.

"This is a good opportunity for Deonte to get his life on track," McCarthy said after the opinion. "He's a guy with potential to do well with a positive example in a positive environment."

Wigod, satisfied with the judge's ruling, said he understands the rationale, because Andrews will maintain jurisdiction. If the judge had ordered prison, he would have no more involvement in the case.

"I'm confident that if he does not follow through with his proper counseling and treatment, the judge will sentence him appropriately," Wigod said.

What about Nate's case?

The judge's ruling was a blended sentence, meaning that London will go through the juvenile system, but freedom is not guaranteed by just reaching a particular age, either 19 or 21.

If he fails to improve, the judge could then send him into the adult system. Because London would have already served about four or five years, how long he would be in prison would be up to the prison and parole officials.

But for Abraham, a blended sentence could have meant that the eight years in the juvenile world could have been followed by decades in prison.

Oakland County Chief Deputy Prosecutor Deborah Carley wishes that Moore had provided that option for Abraham in 1999, though Abraham's attorney, Daniel Bagdade, said it never would have worked for someone so young.

"I love that blended sentence," Carley said, agreeing that young offenders need more rehabilitation to ensure they stay crime-free. "I don't think we use it enough. I agree with it."

Carley will not complain about someone like London avoiding prison if he goes through the juvenile program, and she believes having further ramifications possible for failing to go through it ensures that one will keep focused.

"I think it gives you the best of both worlds," Carley said. "It would have been wonderful for Nathaniel. It also gives you the opportunity, for the juvenile who does not do well, to protect society."

Carley, who has worked extensively as a juvenile prosecutor and has led the Abraham case through his regular review hearings, said it can be hard to determine whether a teenager can change with some job or skills training and group therapy to handle problems such as anger management and conforming to society's norms.

But Bagdade said Abraham was too young to hang a potential 20-year prison sentence over his head.

"In Nate's case, I think it would have been the wrong sentence," Bagdade said. "The main

reason was his age. A blended sentence would have been tantamount to being sentenced as an adult. When you're 16, it's a huge difference than when you are 11."

Bagdade said the blended sentence can be the right one for an older teenager, depending up on their charge, background and history.

While prosecutors regularly complained to Moore about Abraham's behavior at the Maxey training school, based upon occasional fights and other minor infractions, Bagdade said Abraham never made a major mistake. But the possibility of a prison sentence would have been sought at every slight transgression.

"Every small mistake Nate made, they would have jumped on and argued that he should be sent to prison," Bagdade said.

Lawless background

London shot the other teenager July 2, after a friendly gathering turned confrontational when the discussion turned to a girl both teenagers favored. He already was on juvenile probation for minor offenses, such as possessing marijuana.

When London was 8 or 9, he was helping an adult family member sell marijuana, according to a 1998 Department of Human Services report stemming from the boy's stint in foster care when his mother temporarily lost custody of him.

"It's hard to imagine him learning to live by the rules when you're 8 years old peddling drugs, in the street," McCarthy told the judge.

Robert Pinelton, a state probation officer, recommended the prison sentence, testifying that London had been on probation twice for nonviolent juvenile offenses and had gotten into trouble both times, though a larceny charge was dismissed.

At 13, he was arrested for driving a stolen car. In March of this year, he was arrested for marijuana possession. He had not been in school for two months when arrested in March, Pinelton said.

"I think any time you shoot someone, there should be a serious sanction," Pinelton said.

But unless there was a mental illness, a prison term for younger offenders would offer no counseling, Pinelton said when questioned about that by Andrews.

Tough questions

During the Oct. 11 hearing, the judge questioned both attorneys intensely during a best interest hearing.

Told that he would monitor London's progress if the boy were sent into the juvenile system, Andrews asked the defense attorney, "So I'm a social worker at that point?"

And when told by Wigod that London had committed this crime while on juvenile probation for marijuana possession, Andrews asked the prosecutor, "Are you saying he is beyond rehabilitation, he is beyond help?"

The judge seemed concerned that a prison sentence would simply "warehouse" the boy for a little more than a year, releasing him to the public with no future and nothing but lessons learned from fellow inmates, who could likely have been hardened criminals.

"He didn't have much of a home life at all," Andrews said when questioning Pinelton. "Nobody loved or cared for him at all, as far as I've read."

The judge also said he appreciated the seriousness of the offense. He grilled Mc Carthy on what benefits London would get from a juvenile sentence.

The judge noted that he would not hesitate to send London to prison if he thought that's where he belonged.

"This is the judge who put a 14-year-old in prison," Andrews said. "The law required it. She had burned a house down."

The judge was most interested in what ages of people London would be housed with in either setting and what kind of education he would receive. As an adult, he could get his general equivalency degree but be housed with inmates into their mid-20s. As a juvenile, he would get a high school diploma, some community college work, training for a trade and regular counseling.

"He would receive treatment 24/7," said Kathi Milliken, a juvenile justice worker with the Department of Human Services. "He would not be allowed to just do time. He would have to address issues, such as the criminal activity that got him into trouble. He would have to put forth quite a bit of effort to get released (by age 19 or 21)."

Ultimately, London - as a 16-year-old - should understand what he faces and what kind of opportunity he has been given. McCarthy is confident he will take advantage of it and improve.

Bagdade said that Abraham, when he was 13 and standing before a black-robed judge waiting to learn his fate, had no idea what he faced.

"He was clueless," Bagdade said. "For the first year or two (at Maxey), he didn't know why he was there. He didn't get it. He didn't understand the ramifications of the consequences of what happened to him."

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November 25, 2006

Teen in fight may face adult charges

Attorneys mull assault with intent to murder in scuffle at Livonia school; boy's condition improves.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- A Livonia 11th-grader covered his eyes and wept in Wayne County Juvenile Court on Friday as he learned that prosecutors are contemplating charging him as an adult with assault with intent to commit murder for a fight with another boy at Franklin High School on Wednesday.

A court referee granted the Wayne County Prosecutor's request to hold the boy without bond in the county Juvenile Detention Center for five more days until they decide whether to charge him as an adult or juvenile.

Referee Richard McNight told the boy that prosecutors may decide to charge him with the adult felony, which is punishable by up to life in prison.

Another preliminary exam was scheduled for Wednesday, at which time the teen will either be arraigned as an adult or charged as a juvenile, McNight said. The boy had no legal representation at the proceeding.

The teen is accused of throwing Nathan Carlin, a 16-year-old 10th-grader, to the cafeteria floor minutes before school started Wednesday.

Carlin's head hit the floor hard, and he was unresponsive and bleeding from one ear when paramedics arrived on the scene. He was flown to the University of Michigan Medical Center, where he was initially listed in critical condition. On Friday his condition was upgraded to good at Mott Children's Hospital where he was transferred late Wednesday.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Maria Miller said the condition of the victim will factor largely in the decision on what charges to bring.

"The injury might not be as severe as anticipated," Miller said. "We look at the severity of the actions of the defendant, his age and maturity at the time, and whether there have been any past indications of wrongdoing that we could take into consideration.

"Until you interview the witnesses, until you talk to the doctor, and until the complainant can be interviewed, we don't know what we would charge."

The accused boy's father, a Southfield maintenance worker, was visibly shaken in the courtroom and asked whether he could give his son a hug before the teen was led away; he was told he couldn't.

The Detroit News does not typically publish names of the accused until they are arraigned, and is not naming the father in order to protect the identity of his son.

The teen's father said his son and his son's girlfriend were being harassed by Carlin.

He said his son was upset after receiving numerous antagonizing text messages from Carlin over the weekend.

"(Carlin) swung at him, and my son just reacted to him," the father said.

The father said his son called home Thursday from the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Center, where he has been held since the incident.

"He said he wished he could be home with us," the father said. "He really regrets that he did this."

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

[Return to regular web page](#)

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November 27, 2006

Injured teen home after fight at school

George Hunter / The Detroit News

WESTLAND -- Thanksgiving dinner came three days late for the Carlin family.

"But there's a whole lot to be thankful for this year," Deb Carlin said Sunday as she began preparations for the evening's feast.

Her son, Nathan Carlin, 16, was released Saturday from Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor. He is recovering from neck fractures he sustained last week during a fight at Livonia Franklin High School.

"It's been a tough couple days," Deb Carlin said. "The doctors told me he could end up paralyzed. But, scary as it got, a little voice kept telling me things were going to be OK."

Nathan Carlin got into a fight with a classmate, who is in the 11th grade, in the school cafeteria about 7:20 a.m. Wednesday. Carlin was punched by the older student, fell and hit his head on the floor, witnesses and police said.

During a hearing in Wayne County Juvenile Court on Friday, a court referee granted a request by the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office to hold the 11th-grader in the county Juvenile Detention Center for five more days. Prosecutors are considering whether to charge him as an adult or as a juvenile.

Referee Richard McNight on Friday told the teenager that prosecutors are considering charging him as an adult with assault with intent to commit murder, which is punishable by up to life in prison. A preliminary exam is scheduled for Wednesday, and the youth is expected to either be arraigned, as an adult or a juvenile.

It was still unclear Sunday how the fight started -- and Deb Carlin did not want to speculate.

[Return to regular web page](#)

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Article published Nov 25, 2006

Helping teens at risk wins corporate kudos

When Donna Weaver, a former Monroe County resident, mentored a teen foster child kept in a juvenile detention facility, she resolved that there had to be a better way to house abused and neglected teenage girls.

A little TLC and her own family home provided the answer.

Ms. Weaver formed the Teen Life Committee (TLC), composed of Monroe County residents who developed Gwin's Garden Gate, an educational foster home for abused and neglected teenage girls located in what once was Ms. Weaver's northern Monroe County home.

The innovative program, started in February, 2005, has rescued at-risk youth from the criminal justice system and become a state model.

Ms. Weaver of Trenton recently received the 2006 Grand Angel Award from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network and a \$5,000 donation to TLC for her efforts. The award honors those whose extraordinary volunteer efforts enhance the lives of children in Michigan.

Gwin's Garden Gate was Ms. Weaver's response to the concerns Monroe County judges had about the lack of foster homes for teen girls. It meant an average of 60 a year were sent outside the county to areas where the girls had little familiarity.

Ms. Weaver began to understand the need firsthand after mentoring a girl in the foster care system who had no alternative but to stay in a detention facility.

"After seeing all those things, I thought there had to be a better way," she said. "Some girls were in detention just because there was no other place to put them."

She founded TLC with others in the community concerned about the problem, including Monroe County Probate Judge Pamela Moskwa and Deborah Shah, owner of Sensational Beginnings, the Monroe-based toy company.

Founded in 2004, the group began scouting for a suitable residence to house the girls.

"I didn't know it was going to be my own home," Ms Weaver said.

After searching for a suitable facility, "someone said to me, 'What about your house?' " Ms. Weaver recalled. She and her husband, David Barkholz, had lived in the home three years. It had six bedrooms and 3½ baths, and was configured well for a group home.

"We thought long and hard about it and said it would be fine, so we moved out and started the program in the home," she said. "We knew it was something we had to do."

Mrs. Shah committed funds to part of the project, choosing the program to receive 50 cents from her firm for each order it received during the holiday season. That raised more than \$48,000 a year ago, and the program again will be the beneficiary of the Sensational Beginnings program this holiday season.

Ms. Weaver decided, "If she was that committed, I was committed, so we moved out of the home, downsized and put the girls in the home."

Gwin's Garden Gate opened a year ago, and it now houses four teens and a foster family.

"It's a licensed foster home, and the programming is awesome," she said.

"We've taken a loving foster family home and brought in the educational services residential facilities offer, so it's the best of both worlds," she said.

TLC provides educational and transportation services to after-school programs and weekend activities, tutoring, career preparation and mentoring to the teens.

"The girls are the true angels, along with the Teen Life Committee itself," said Ms. Weaver, who wants to expand the program in the near future. "It's been very rewarding. When you reach out to help others and hear their stories, it's the energy and the fuel behind our efforts."

Ms. Weaver is the founder and president of Parents for Student Employment Safety Standards, a nonprofit agency based in Riverview that provides youth employment safety training in schools and other venues.

More information about PASSES or Gwin's Garden Gate is available by calling 281-7160 or by visiting www.passesedge.org.

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Article published Nov 25, 2006

Grand Angel Award speech by Donna Weaver

Below is a copy of the speech given by Donna Weaver when she won the Grand Angel Award:

"Many people, including Madonna, are going overseas to adopt orphans. That's certainly commendable.

But we have tens of thousands of orphans right here in Michigan and the United States. They just go by a different name: foster children.

"Through no fault of their own, they have been taken from their homes and placed elsewhere to spare them further abuse and neglect. They need our help.

"Two years ago, a group of us started Gwin's Garden Gate in Monroe County. It's an educational foster home where we bring community services to teen girls. They get mentors, tutors and life-skill training.

"It's been hard work. But we're seeing progress. The girls are being nurtured to grow to their full potential.

"If you have it in your heart, consider fostering a child. There's also great need for mentors, Big Brothers and Big Sisters or people to give foster parents a well-deserved break.

"I want to thank Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan for this award. But I'm one of many people behind Gwin's Garden Gate.

"I want to personally thank Debra Shah of Sensational Beginnings Toys in Monroe for her commitment to the program. I want to thank my family for their sacrifices. And I'd like to recognize Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, and Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura "Corrigan for their determination to improve the lives of children.

"We have orphans in America They just go by a different name.

"Thank you again. And God Bless You."

11/24/2006

CD benefits children's causes

TRAVERSE CITY — Jazz musician Jeff Haas joins Grand Traverse Pie Company in releasing a new benefit CD, "Your Peace Counts."

The CD features northern Michigan jazz musicians in a collection of music with a message of peace, love and hope. Those participating include Janice Keegan, Clare Fischer, Claudia Schmidt, Horace Silver, Ron Getz, the Neptune Quartet with special guest Alan Epstein, Don Julin, Laurie Sears, Nancy Stagnita, Bill Sears, Steve Stargardt, Jack Dryden, Dave Collini, John Alfieri and Haas. The CD was recorded at Interlochen Public Radio.

A CD Release Party will be held Saturday from 8 to 11 p.m. at Gallerie Medici located adjacent to the Pie Company on W. Front Street. Live jazz will be performed by Schmidt, Keegan, Getz, Stagnita, Dryden, Stargardt, Sears, Collini, the Neptune Quartet and Jeff Haas Trio. Fresh pie and locally made wine will be served.

Tickets are \$15, available from the Pie Company, Gallerie Medici, Brys Estate Winery and the Traverse City Visitors' Center in advance, or at the door.

The first volume of the "Your Peace Counts" CD will be available for sale at the Pie Company this weekend and at www.gtpie.com. A portion of proceeds from each CD sold will benefit Michigan children's non-profit organizations. Proceeds from the evening will be donated to Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative, an agency that helps children make the transition from foster care to independence.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

A vital safety net Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes looks to raise amount of food it provides to area's needy

Sunday, November 26, 2006

By Cedric Ricks

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Alexandra Hawkins comes to a Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes food pantry only when she needs too.

The Kalamazoo resident saw her food stamps cut this month and needed emergency groceries to feed herself and her two teenage daughters.

Like many who come to the food pantries, Hawkins has a job. She works part-time with a local movie theater and is going to school at Grand Rapids Community College to study culinary arts.

"This really helps," said Hawkins, who left a pantry at First United Methodist Church in downtown Kalamazoo with four bags of groceries. "I don't abuse the system, but I use it when I need it."

Hawkins is one of thousands of Kalamazoo County residents who have turned to Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes for assistance during the agency's nearly 25 years of service.

Incorporated in March 1982, the agency operates 21 food pantries across Kalamazoo County, including 10 in the city of Kalamazoo, three in Portage, two in Kalamazoo Township and six others in the out-county areas.

Last year the agency distributed 778,864 pounds of food, an increase of more than 41 percent since 2000. In October, it distributed, 81,147 pounds, the largest amount of food in one month during the agency's history.

It's an important safety net for the area's most vulnerable citizens -- a role that's expected to deepen as the agency embarks on a strategic plan to increase the amount of food it makes available to residents by 75 percent within three to five years. More food, volunteers and cash donations from the public will be needed to make that goal a reality.

'In it for the long haul'

"Kalamazoo Loves and Fishes used to jokingly talk about putting ourselves out of business," said Anne Wend Lipsey, the organization's executive director. "I think what this plan and process has done is to help us recognize that we need to be in it for the long haul."

Hunger is a chronic problem, one that won't be easily solved, she said. Currently, about 12 percent of Kalamazoo County's population, or more than 28,000 residents, are living at or below the poverty level, according to statistics from the Kalamazoo County Public Housing Commission.

In the city of Kalamazoo, more than 30 percent of residents live in poverty, according to the American Community Survey done by the U.S. Census Bureau.

"No one in Kalamazoo should have to wonder where his or her next meal is coming from or if there will even be a next meal," said Lipsey. "But this is a monthly struggle for some of our friends and neighbors."

Last year, Loaves and Fishes had an operating budget of \$1.15 million, which included about \$500,000 worth of in-kind donations.

Kalamazoo Mayor Hannah McKinney said she recognizes Loaves and Fishes' important role in the community.

“Loaves and Fishes has become the agency providing food to those who need it,” McKinney said. “There are 21 sites throughout Kalamazoo County. It’s amazing, but it’s also incredibly sad.”

Hawkins got a two-day supply of food -- the standard amount that is given to hungry residents who call the organization looking for assistance.

All callers need to do is declare themselves in need of food and provide some identifying information such as name, address, birth date and family size. They are eligible for help once a month, but can get referrals from case workers, ministers, schools or other social service agencies and get assistance more frequently.

A two-decade partnership

Lipsey said Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes came into existence more than two decades ago after pastors in churches along Bronson Park began brainstorming about what to do as an increasing number of the area’s hungry came knocking on their doors asking for food.

The solution was to have a central effort in which volunteers would accept requests for food and then direct residents to food pantries in areas of the community that are nearest to them, Lipsey said.

“All through our history it’s been this partnership between the faith community, individuals and others,” Lipsey said, noting that the agency has more than 300 volunteers. “We have had volunteers from the faith community and other places that have been the connectors or the folks who do the screenings.”

Area residents donate about 40 percent of the food Loaves and Fishes gives out. That can come through collections at area schools and churches or through larger community efforts such as the annual mail carriers food drive or thorough efforts such as Bronson Healthcare Group’s food drive.

“One of the things that’s been great about food collections in the last couple of years is that we have been able to really target the kind of food we need,” Lipsey said.

The public is realizing that some items -- particular those high in protein -- are really needed by the agency.

“They recognize that a pound of peanut butter is more valuable to the community than a pound of flour or vegetables,” Lipsey said.

Lipsey said another 45 percent of the food her agency receives comes from the Food Bank of South Central Michigan in Battle Creek and America’s Second Harvest, a national food supply agency. Food from the food bank is donated or purchased at low-cost, she said.

The remaining amount of food used by Loaves and Fishes is purchased in the retail wholesale market. Monetary donations, such as recent check for \$7,500 from Panera Bread, make that possible, Lipsey said.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Food pantry goal will rely on community

Monday, November 27, 2006

If anyone doubts that poverty and hunger exist in this community, just check out the statistics over the last six years at Loaves & Fishes, a countywide food pantry that serves the poor.

Between 2000 and 2005, the amount of food distributed by the organization increased 41 percent, a reflection of the state and local economy, as well as state budget woes that have forced cutbacks in government assistance to the poor.

Loaves & Fishes, which soon will mark its 25th year serving the community, in 2005 distributed 778,864 pounds of food. Last month, the agency distributed 81,147 pounds of food, the greatest amount it has given out over a one-month period since it was incorporated in March 1982. It was born when churches that ring Kalamazoo's Bronson Park became concerned about the number of people asking them for food, and decided to set up a coordinated effort to feed the hungry.

Anne Wend Lipsey, executive director of Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes, said people in the organization used to joke about putting themselves out of business.

But it has become clear that the need for Loaves & Fishes is greater than ever. Within three to five years, the organization plans to increase by 75 percent the amount of food it distributes. And with the economic forecast for Michigan not showing much improvement in the next couple of years, an increase like that may well be needed.

That's why Loaves & Fishes will be relying on the members of this community to make certain that the poorest among us won't have to worry about where their next meal is coming from.

Let's resolve to help Loaves & Fishes meet its goal.

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Tiny pantry is huge help to the needy

Face of Hunger

MT. MORRIS TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, November 26, 2006

By Laura Misjak

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MT. MORRIS TWP. - The number of people helped by the food pantry at Fairhaven Seventh-day Adventist Church won't break any records.

Barely a dozen families a week seek food and other items from the pantry, which is run by a trio of energetic octogenarians.

It's typical of many of the pantries served by the Flint-based Food Bank of Eastern Michigan. It may be small and barely noticeable, but it's vital to the lives of the people it serves.

"I'm here almost every day for emergencies," said Kate Young, 83, the pantry's director. "If they don't have bus fare and it's 4:30 or 5 p.m., they can come in the next day or whenever. It's not cut and dried. " The mission is to meet people where they are."

To insure that small pantries such as Fairhaven's survive, the food bank is conducting its annual Face of Hunger holiday fundraising campaign. Donation envelopes will be available in Friday's Flint Journal. The campaign helps fund supplies at the food bank, from which hundreds of pantries obtain goods to feed the hungry at bargain prices.

Most of the provisions that fill Fairhaven's pantry comes from the Flint food bank.

Rooms filled with clothing and a garage brimming with food are in the small house covered in tan, brick, and white siding on the edge of the church's parking lot, 1379 W. Louis Ave.

Young, Renee Fleetwood, 80, and Jocephus Mance, 83, run every detail at the 38-year-old center, working far beyond its allotted hours.

The volunteers are at the site and packing boxes of food from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. every Thursday. On a recent Thursday, such food items as canned soup, potatoes and bananas filled the kitchen tables, organized in different piles. The hodgepodge of food and clothing in the former parsonage cater to the dozen or so families seeking help each week.

"Each box is unique," Young said. "We try to put a little personal touch to each one."

Young usually comes in throughout the week to answer phone calls from families in need.

Shirlenia Rutherford, a grandmother of three, glanced through the shelves of shoes, her eyes darting immediately to a pair of formal brown heels.

"Can I have these?" Rutherford asked Young, who was preparing her box. Rutherford left with a week's worth of food and two new pairs of shoes.

Rutherford's visit was her first; until recently, she'd been in a local shelter after being released from prison, where she was serving time for bad check charges. She was glad to see she could get food and personal

items, as well as clothing.

"It was very helpful," Rutherford said. "It was great."

Those seeking help sit in the waiting-room section of the living room while Young phones to check in with whichever agency referred them to the church - usually Flint's Love INC.

"You have to be careful," Young said after one woman in need saw the small roasted chicken and box full of bananas, bread, potatoes, apples and asked, "Is that all?"

"If there's one person in the family, we pack enough for one person. " Most people are grateful," Young said.

Giving someone too much food may entice the recipient to sell it for drug money, she said.

Boxes rarely contain treats or unhealthy items, Young said, noting the center places a focus on health.

Videotapes line the shelf beneath the television, where she sometimes shows segments on healthy living. The pantry has boxes full of nectarines, grapefruit and oranges directly from Florida - sold as part of a fundraiser the center conducts.

"If you want a person to be total, he has to have good health," Young said. "You can't think right if you're not in good health. You can't worship if you're not in good health."

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THE BAY CITY TIMES

An extra helping of SUPPORT

Thursday, November 23, 2006

By **TOM GILCHRIST**

TIMES WRITER

HARRISON - They've dished out free food and encouragement for 14 years at the Hard Times Cafe, and Mark Beers had his first helping last Thursday.

"I was beyond rock bottom this summer," said Beers, 45, a newcomer to the weekly meal at St. Athanasius Catholic Church in Harrison in Clare County, one of Michigan's poorest counties.

"For a couple weeks, I was living in a park in Farwell," Beers said. "I had no car. I just walked."

Beers has since moved in with his girlfriend at a Clare motel, and in September he found a job working a couple of days each week at a Burger King restaurant.

That's what the Hard Times Cafe is all about - self-improvement through support, and over a hot meal. In a county with the fifth-highest unemployment rate among Michigan's 83 counties, the nonprofit organization that runs the cafe feeds the needy a free meal every Thursday. Volunteers help prepare and serve the meal.

And while the meal is important, it's the support that keeps diners coming back.

When Beers told the crowd of about 50 that he had found shelter and some work, he received applause.

Over turkey, stuffing, potatoes and pumpkin pie, Jerri L. Golden, 31, of Harrison, talked about raising her two daughters, ages 7 and 5.

"I've just been taking care of my kids this last year - that's it," Golden announced.

"That's doing a lot!" someone replied, and the audience clapped for Golden.

Clare County ranks third worst in the state among Michigan's 83 counties in the percentage of children living in poverty, according to federal statistics.

Anyone may attend the weekly meal, served at 4:20 p.m. Thursdays at St. Athanasius Catholic Church. Volunteers won't serve a meal today on Thanksgiving.

The cafe opened in 1992 as a response to the state of Michigan wiping out the General Assistance form of welfare, said Gretchen Wilbur, a state Department of Human Services employee serving on the cafe's board of directors.

Wilbur said it's often been difficult to keep the cafe doors open. But somehow, it happens.

"It would be a shame if we ever lost this organization, because there's a lot of us poor people around here," said Joyce E. Rowe, 64, of Harrison, who ate and socialized at a table filled with eight adults and children.

The Cafe isn't just a hand-out. Volunteers - called patrons - can earn "points of improvement" used to buy clothes or furniture from the Togg Shop, a Harrison store run by the same nonprofit group that operates the cafe.

Patrons also can redeem points for vouchers that pay for food, gas or other necessities.

The Togg Shop uses some of its proceeds to buy food for the Cafe meal. The cafe also seeks grants and donations of money or food.

"This is a good program, not just to help people financially but to build their self-esteem," said Nicole I. Galvan, 46, of Farwell, who said she has eaten occasionally at the Hard Times Cafe for about seven years. Galvan also has worked in the Togg Shop.

"This shows people they do have worth in this world," said Galvan, who brought her husband, Cleo, and her 2-year-old granddaughter to the Nov. 16 meal.

Nicole and Cleo Galvan both hope to find a job.

Jerry Thompson, 42, a Togg Shop patron from Harrison, said he also tends to his father, who had a leg amputated and suffered a stroke.

"I've been trying to stay out of trouble the best I can, which is real hard, and I hope for the best for everybody else here, too," Thompson told the audience after the meal, served on this day by volunteers from the Clare United Methodist Church.

Dr. Carrie Nicholson and Dr. David Bremer - both members of the Clare church - stood side by side in the kitchen with other volunteers, dishing out food.

"Everyone wants to know about mission work they can do overseas, down South and everywhere else, but you can do mission work in your backyard," Bremer said. "Every community has these kinds of needs, but you have to be willing to help."

Sister Rosemary Wrinn, of St. Athanasius Catholic Church, said she feels privileged that her church hosts cafe visitors every week.

"They are the poor right under your nose," Wrinn said. "And it's time to reach out to serve them."

- Tom Gilchrist covers regional news for The Times. He can be reached at 894-9649 or by e-mail at tgilchrist@bc-times.com.

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Food bank, pantries, clients adjusting to higher cost of gasoline

Face of Hunger

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Monday, November 27, 2006

By Laura Misjak

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High gasoline prices are having a ripple effect on everyone - including the hungry.

Some have trouble affording gas to get to a pantry for food, instead turning to others for rides or having one person pick up the goods for five.

David Klafter, coordinator of the Columbiaville United Methodist food pantry, said he has seen a change in how rural families are finding food.

"We run about 55 families a month through, and they're carpooling together so everybody doesn't have to drive," Klafter said. "That way, they'll have one guy pick up food for maybe four families that live in the neighborhood, and we get the OK from those people."

Klafter said others can't afford their own vehicle, so food will be delivered to them.

"I've got some that are on a total income of less than \$1,000 a month," he said. "Even though you might be a single adult and try to live on \$1,000 a month and pay your apartment rent, you can't afford a car. We'll pick up the food and take it to them."

But the Flint-based Food Bank of Eastern Michigan is also there to help. The organization is mindful that small pantries on tight budgets may have trouble buying the gas to come to Flint to pick up food supplies.

As a result, the food bank has set up more drop sites within its 22-county service area. Drop sites are central locations where the food bank delivers items for pickup by pantries.

The food bank also has increased how often it restocks those drop sites.

"The gas prices have definitely put a strain on our partner agencies picking up food," said Kara Ross, director of programs and agency relations at the food bank. "We've increased our drop sites and the frequency of our drop sites, and we've increased the locations to have more closer to our agencies."

The Flint Journal will have collection envelopes in Friday's newspaper to support the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan's Face of Hunger Campaign.

This is the 10th year of the campaign, and sights are set on a \$600,000 goal - \$50,000 more than last year.

For some rural agencies, the need to give trumps any cost for gasoline.

"Obviously, gas prices are a problem for everybody," said Terry Pace, a pantry volunteer at Otisville Church of Christ. "You get out and drive anyway, and for a trip like this, I don't even think about gas. We're going to do it anyway."

Jim Schaffer, who helps with the Columbiaville pantry, said the number of families it assists has climbed

from about 30 to 55 each month. No matter the number in need or the price of gas, Schaffer said the pantry will continue to feed as many as it can.

"If the need is there, we find a way to handle it, to help a family," he said. "(The price of gas) hasn't affected our handling at all, none whatsoever."

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More show up for free meals in Saginaw

Monday, November 27, 2006

**MARY L. LAWRENCE
THE SAGINAW NEWS**

Living on \$400 in Supplemental Security Income payments and \$39 in food stamps each month barely sustains Sandy DeLong of Bridgeport Township.

"You can't live on that," insisted DeLong as she ate an after-Thanksgiving meal Friday at Saginaw's East Side Soup Kitchen.

"I eat here a few days most weeks. It makes it rough when you don't have anything more coming in."

Desmond Castro, 36, of Saginaw agrees. He also counts on a hot meal from the Soup Kitchen several times a week to stretch his dollars.

"I'm the primary care provider for my mother, and we're getting no assistance from the state," Castro said. "Coming here helps out tremendously."

"Usually they serve soup and sandwiches, but occasionally we get much more than what we expect. Plus, everyone is civilized over here. They offer you a meal no questions asked. Anyone can eat here. This place really helps people."

DeLong and Castro are among those Americans the U.S. Department of Agriculture describes as less hungry in 2005.

People depending on the soup kitchen and other agencies that provide help with meals and food don't necessarily describe themselves as hungry. They merely have learned how to supplement day-to-day living costs.

The department's annual report says the number of hungry or "food insecure" people dropped in 2005 -- the first time in six years.

Last year, they say, 35 million people suffered insecurity, meaning they didn't have enough money or resources to get food. The number was 38 million in 2004.

"We haven't experienced (a decline), especially at this time of year," insisted Rich Premo, president of Saginaw's Hidden Harvest, a gleaning agency that distributes surplus food to soup kitchens, food pantries, churches and other organizations in Saginaw, Midland and Bay counties.

"We've had many more calls from food pantries letting us know their cupboards are bare."

The report side-stepped using the word "hunger" in its report, drawing criticism from some. The terms "low food security" and "very low food security" replaced the old descriptions of "food insecurity without hunger" and "food insecurity with hunger."

Whatever the government chooses to call hunger, there's no decline in the number of people regularly seeking free meals at Saginaw's East Side Soup Kitchen.

"Our numbers are up 20 percent over last year," said Pam Cole, the Soup Kitchen's director. "It's almost like (government officials are) not looking. We're averaging 282 people a day. Last year, it was 230 a day."

The kitchen shares space with Hidden Harvest in the Hunger Solution Center, 940 E. Genesee in Saginaw.

"We're trying to find as much funding as we can, since it's taking more and more food to feed all of the people. And it's not just at this time of year, but all year long," Cole said.

"Food prices keep going up. After the first of the year, we'll need new money sources and write more grants."

"At this time of year in a six-week period in November and December, we get about 50 percent of our donations for the entire year. It sure would be nice to get people to give all year long."

Among the resources the East Side Soup Kitchen counts on to help stock its shelves is the Flint-based Food Bank of Eastern Michigan. That agency delivers food to 17 sites in Saginaw and 21 other counties.

In Saginaw County in 2005, some 55 partner agencies serving an estimated 58,400 people shared the food.

Chicago-based America's Second Harvest, the nation's largest charitable hunger relief organization, named the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan as the 2006 recipient of its Program of the Year award for its effort to provide food to hungry children on weekends.

Through its four mass feeding locations -- which includes Saginaw's First Ward Community Center -- the food bank distributes 10,000 to 15,000 pounds of supplemental food every week.

Wednesday, the agency will launch its Holiday Campaign to raise some \$600,000 to continue to help fill the hunger gap as it observes December as "Food Bank Month."

Last year, the campaign raised more than \$550,000. That translated into 7.7 million pounds of food. Those wishing to contribute to the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan will find a donation envelope in Saturday's Saginaw News.

"With all of the hardships our economy has faced, this year's holiday campaign will be crucial for the families that are struggling here in our own back yards," said William E. Kerr, food bank president.

The agency distributes some 3 million pounds of food in Saginaw County, Kerr said, adding that 97 percent of the funds collected in the campaign go directly to feeding needy people.

Meanwhile, Hidden Harvest recently purchased a new \$43,000 refrigerated truck with a 2-ton capacity to accommodate the increasing amounts of food it gleans from various sources.

"There are more people contributing food to us," Premo said. "They like the idea of not wasting food and getting it to us, so we needed a larger refrigerated truck."

Earlier this month, Premo received a donation of 40,000 pounds of potatoes. They were gone in about two weeks.

"It usually only takes a week or two to turn out a product like that. We're trying to find as much food as we can. We're taking in more and more food to meet the need. It's been constant all year.

"This month, for example, we'll rescue and distribute more than 140,000 pounds. By month's end, the warehouse will be empty again. That's how fast it passes through here."

Annually, Hidden Harvest connects with some 170 agencies -- food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, after-school operations and senior citizen centers in Saginaw, Bay and Midland counties

"For many of these people," Premo said, "the less they spend on food means they may have a little more for medicine or housing costs or clothes for their kids. If they can get some relief in the food category, it helps a family tremendously.

"People learn to use the available resources well, and they're grateful." v

Mary L. Lawrence is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9676.

Quality of some child care questioned

Mandatory training for aides, relatives urged

BY LORI HIGGINS
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

November 23, 2006

An 18-hour course for adults who provide child care for their relatives taught Kari Vestrand some important lessons about child development, CPR, discipline and nutrition.

"I want to take care of my niece and nephews to the best of my ability. As much as you think you know, there is always more to learn," Vestrand, 29, of Ferndale, said Monday.

Still, she opposes a recommendation included in a report that says people like her -- unlicensed child care providers who receive funding through the state's Child Care Development Fund program -- should undergo mandatory training.

"It's a valuable service to offer," said Vestrand, who cares for her sister-in-law's three children. But, "to require it would be a hardship."

The report, which the Education Policy Center at Michigan State University issued in October, says Michigan has a disproportionate number of child care providers -- relatives and day care aides -- who aren't regulated. Their only requirements are to register with the state and undergo criminal background checks.

But providers who run day care centers and family and group child care programs are licensed and required to undergo training annually.

The report's authors say relatives and day care aides also should be required to have some training to ensure that they're capable of providing quality care. They also hope state officials act on their recommendations.

The need for such training is clear in the numbers, the report states. Nationwide, it says, about 30% of child care providers who receive money through the Child Care Development Fund -- a federal program for which states provide matching dollars -- are relatives or day care aides. But in Michigan, that number is 66%.

"We need some assurances, as taxpayers, that our money is being spent on a certain minimal level of quality," said Larry Schweinhart, the report's coauthor and president of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.

How the system works

Money from the Child Care Development Fund goes directly to the child care provider, except in the case of day care aides. In those cases, parents who employ aides get the money and are expected to pay the aides.

To get the money, parents must meet one of the three conditions:

- They have low incomes.
- They receive public assistance and need child care to work, look for work or go to school.
- They receive services through the Michigan Department of Human Services in areas such as foster care.

During the 2006 fiscal year, \$442,632,517 was distributed in Michigan.

Though the money funds child care for children of all ages, much of it goes to providers who care for children in their early years. And the report's authors say the lack of licensing for relatives and day care aides can affect

Options for child care

• Child care centers: These include preschools, nursery schools, before- and after-school programs and Head Start programs. Centers must have a license.

• Group child care homes: This is where two or more adults provide care for up to 12 children. The homes require a license.

• Family child care homes: These are homes in which an adult cares for one to six children. These must be registered with the state.

• Relatives: A relative who provides care in his or her own home and does not live with the child must be 18 and enrolled with the Department of Human Services to receive payments from the state.

• Day care aide: This is a person employed to provide care in the children's home. Aides must be 18 and enrolled with Department of Human Services to receive payments from the state.

Source: Michigan 4C Association and Michigan Department of Human Services

Quality of some child care questioned

children's preparation for success in school.

Sharif Shakrani, codirector of MSU's education policy center, said children who aren't in a quality child care or preschool program tend to fall behind once in school.

What's being done to help

While the report provides an accurate portrayal of the numbers, officials at the human services department, which administers Child Care Development Fund dollars, said it doesn't reflect the steps taken to address the disproportionate number of providers in Michigan who are relatives or day care aides.

In 2005, Gov. Jennifer Granholm created the nonprofit Early Childhood Investment Corp. "to focus on and address the very issues identified in this report," said Lisa Brewer Walraven, federal liaison and policy adviser for the department.

"Incrementally, we are moving toward addressing these issues and improving the quality of care for children and families," Walraven said. "We're doing that with limited resources."

Some of the efforts include voluntary programs train relatives and day care providers, such as the one Vestrand attended earlier this month. At least one of the programs offers a \$150 incentive to providers who attend.

Next spring, a pilot program will require newly registered relative providers and parents to attend an orientation addressing health and safety, as well as child development issues, Walraven said.

The program, Shakrani said, is a step in the right direction.

But the fact that a provider isn't licensed doesn't mean he or she doesn't provide good care. Licensing "in and of itself doesn't always mean the program is quality," said Jim Sinnamon, director of the division of child day care licensing for the human services department.

Eva Poole, an educator with the Michigan State University Extension, runs the course Vestrand attended. She said demand for the program has increased in the last year, with 20 people graduating from the most recent course, which she offers every few months.

The providers learn about new research on brain development, laws regarding discipline and corporal punishment, nutrition and literacy. They also are given tips for keeping children occupied that don't involve television and video games.

"We're helping people understand they're really being surrogate parents. They're with the kids more than the parents are a lot of times," Poole said.

"We really push them to be good mentors and teachers."

Contact **LORI HIGGINS** at 248-351-3694 or lhiggins@freepress.com.

How to find the right caregiver

Here are some steps parents should follow when choosing a provider: • **Interview possible caregivers and visit the child care site.** Ask about everything, but don't forget education and training, because the caregivers' skill is often an indicator of quality care. A state license or registration is a minimum requirement.

• **Check references.** Ask for a list of current and former clients. Ask them how well the caregiver does with their child, and how well the caregiver communicates with them.

• **Stay involved.** Ask for and expect regular conversations with the caregiver about your child.

Source: Michigan 4C Association and Michigan Department of Human Services

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Michigan's most willing volunteers are women

BY PATRICIA MONTEMURRI

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

November 25, 2006

Nearly half of Michigan adults raised their hands last year to volunteer, and the hands raised most were those of women.

About 54% of women surveyed recently by Michigan State University said they donated their time, compared with 43% of men surveyed.

It's during the season of giving that many Michiganders want to give their time.

Around the year-end holidays, organizations see a spike in requests from people and businesses seeking ways to help out people who are less fortunate. And schools, youth-related groups and faith-based organizations -- where most volunteers commit their time -- also rely heavily on donated effort now.

Cyndy D'Ascenzo, 43, of Farmington Hills, a mother of four who works in her husband's corporate real estate business and does floral arrangements for weddings, has a jam-packed schedule through the end of the year.

This week, she was helping out in her daughter's first-grade classroom with a Thanksgiving meal. She leads two Girl Scout troops, coordinates the math decathlon games for the first grade at Forest Elementary, and she is fund-raising cochair for her youngest son's preschool.

"And on Christmas Eve, we deliver Meals on Wheels," D'Ascenzo said. "I love it all. It gives me balance."

The holiday season's spirit of giving contributes to a surge of volunteering requests at year's end, said Diana Algra, executive director of the Volunteer Centers of Michigan. Volunteer Centers, often paired with local United Way organizations, acts as a clearinghouse to match volunteers with organizations.

"People need assistance all year long," Algra said. "People who have great commitments and passions, they give all year long."

Renee Truitt, who oversees volunteers at Focus: HOPE, said the landmark Detroit organization deploys nearly 20,000 volunteers annually in programs for children, seniors, employment training and tutoring. It spikes around the holidays, as schools, businesses and service groups help collect, pack and deliver food and gift packages to needy families and seniors.

Much of the work and the rewards of volunteering are experienced by women.

Women with children and women who work have higher volunteer rates than other women, reversing the trends of previous generations, according to a study released last summer by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Women also account for three out of four registered volunteers with United Way of Southeastern Michigan's Volunteer Center, said Patricia McCann, a spokeswoman for the organization.

"If you are a woman, and you happen to be married with kids, you may give up more time to their schools, their after-school activities," Algra said.

"Michigan is a really strong state when it comes to volunteering and giving," said Kyle Caldwell, director of ConnectMichigan Alliance, a Lansing-based organization that promotes volunteerism and cosponsors the annual MSU survey.

MSU's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research interviewed 960 Michigan adults in summer 2006.

Here are some of the findings, according to professor Mark Wilson:



Mikaela Rosen, 6, left, chats with volunteer Cyndy D'Ascenzo as she gets a hug from daughter Kenzie, 6. (MADALYN RUGGIERO/Special to the Free Press)

Twist

This weekend's edition of Twist celebrates volunteerism. Look for Twist with your weekend ad inserts. For more volunteer opportunities, go to www.twistdetroit.com.

- In 2005, 49% of Michigan residents said they had volunteered in the previous 12 months.
- Residents in northern Michigan had the highest rate of volunteering -- 59%. In southeastern Michigan, about 44% of residents volunteered in 2005.
- Of the folks who didn't volunteer in 2005, about two-thirds said they had volunteered in the past, but busy schedules or health reasons prevented them from recent volunteer pursuits.
- Among Michigan volunteers, more than half said their pursuits have a connection with religious groups, educational organizations or youth development. About 13% said they volunteered for environmental organizations, and about 14% said they volunteered for a political campaign or cause.

Contact **PATRICIA MONTEMURRI** at 313-223-4538 or pmontemurri@freepress.com.

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Price is right as charity finds new headquarters

Saturday, November 25, 2006

By Morgan Jarema

The Grand Rapids Press

Delivering Christmas presents to more than 11,000 children in a single day takes organization.

Finding a large, empty building to lease for about a month so dozens of volunteers can receive, wrap and otherwise prepare all those presents for delivery often involves a bit of luck.

Throw in the cost of keeping the space lighted, heated and snow-free, and some might call it a Christmas miracle, Spartan style.

This year, the Santa Claus Girls is working in spacious comfort, thanks to Spartan Stores, which donated the use of its vacant 53,617-square-foot former D&W grocery store on Remembrance Road in Walker whose lease Spartan inherited after the company acquired the D&W chain.

"It seemed like a really good, temporary use of the building," Spartan spokeswoman Jeanne Norcross said. "And it made sense to us to make it available for this cause we're all familiar with."

Spartan also is paying the tab for heat, electricity and snowplow service.

Santa Claus Girls President Barb Bowe considered The Press-sponsored charity fortunate for the past five years to be able to lease the same building on Turner Avenue NW.

This year, Bowe was given about a month to find a location that met the group's criteria: a very short-term lease of at least 15,000 square feet, a loading dock, working restrooms -- though they have settled for portable toilets in years past -- and a large parking area that can squeeze in about 125 vehicles on delivery day.

Heat also is a plus, but they have done without that as well.

"I was astounded," Bowe said of Spartan's donation. "That's about \$7,000, which means \$7,000 more we can use for the kids."

You can help get Christmas gifts to needy children:

Recipients

Each year, Santa Claus Girls receives a list of needy families with children ages 6 months to 12 years from the Department of Human Services.

Other families with children in need of Christmas gifts may call 735-0602 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays, beginning Monday.

Donations

Mail checks or money orders to:

Santa Claus Girls, c/o The Grand Rapids Press, 155 Michigan St. NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503.

Credit card contributions may be made by calling 222-5308 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays.

DONORS' LIST

The Thomas S. Fox Family Fund at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation\$1,000.00

The Priscilla Circle of North Park Presbyterian Church\$100.00

Darryle West\$73.42

Irene Steffensen\$50.00

The Grand Rapids Press employee bottle return fund\$114.00

In memory of ...

Grandmother Frey on behalf of Mary, Cindy, Sarah and Barb Frey\$3,000.00

Roland and Karen Beineman from Marjorie Beineman\$30.00

My son Jeremy Waranica, remembering our 21 Christmases with love, Mom\$25.00

My Dad Harry Waranica who gave us so much, from Patrice\$25.00

Grandmother Mary Ureel from Mary Grutter\$50.00

Dorothy Lake from Jeff & Sue Porter\$25.00

TODAY'S TOTAL\$4,492.42

TOTAL TO DATE\$8,443.56

AMOUNT ASKED\$165,000.00

AMOUNT NEEDED\$156,556.44

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Needy hope to catch a wish

Friday, November 24, 2006

MARY L. LAWRENCE

THE SAGINAW NEWS

A 17-year-old who lives with her great-grandmother wants a pair of size 13 pants and large size tops.

"I have been trying hard to find a job, but it's hard," she writes in this year's Holiday Wish List.

Another request is from a partially blind single mom with three children. Her wish is simple: "Some help."

Meanwhile, an 83-year-old woman wants to stay warm through the winter with "a coverlet or cotton woven blanket for my bed and some meat."

Many of the more than 650 people on the annual wish list are seeking to fill basic needs -- food, clothing, blankets, boots and jobs. Applicants may choose one or all three categories -- clothes, food or toys. In 2005, donations of goods and cash totaled some \$96,000 and helped more than 2,600 people.

The Saginaw News will publish the entire collection in Sunday's edition. Donors interested in fulfilling a wish should call 755-8855 starting Monday. Phone lines are open from

9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays through Friday, Dec. 8.

People interested in supporting the Wish List may choose a specific request, donate individual items or send cash donations for the Wish List staff to select and fill a wish for them. Organizers say all cash donations will go toward completing wishes from applicants.

In its 21st year, the effort to collect wishes from some of Saginaw County's neediest residents is a collaboration between the United Way of Saginaw County's Community Volunteer Services and the county's Department of Human Services.

Ironically, in the face of tough economic times and high unemployment, the number of requests on this year's list is some 200 fewer than last year -- 654 compared to 895 in 2005. The Department of Human Services screens applicants to determine eligibility.

"We changed our application process, and we think that may be why we are down," said Marsha L. Cooley, volunteer services coordinator for the United Way.

The good news, Cooley said, is donors already are calling to select wishes.

"I have over 140 wishes already adopted," she said.

Early birds include members of the Communication Pioneers, a group of Communications Family Credit Union retirees. They decorated a Christmas tree in the credit union lobby with wishes.

"Each ornament has a toy request on it," said Amy Flood, marketing specialist at Communications Family Credit Union, 6640 Bay in Kochville Township.

"We've already had credit union members taking the ornaments. Ending up with a naked Christmas tree would be a good thing," she said.

"Communications (Family Credit Union) members have always been generous when it comes to community events. To see them take the ornaments so quickly is a very pleasant surprise. They always follow through with a toy.

"This is our way to tap into members who are not Pioneers, too. We're hoping to collect at least 100 toys. If we run out of ornament requests, we can always get more. That would be the best possible scenario."

A similar tree with removable ornaments stands at Old Country Buffet, 4695 Bay in Saginaw Township, for customers to select and return gift purchases to the restaurant.

Saginaw Firefighters Ona Hoard and Aileen Ceisla, who work out of Saginaw Fire Station 3, are honorary chairs of this year's Wish List.

"As firefighters, we see victims of a fire at a very devastating time in their lives," said Ceisla, 35, of Saginaw.

"We wanted to give something back to these victims who sometimes lose everything in a fire," she said.

All four Saginaw fire stations have collection boxes.

For a second year, Ceisla and Hoard are spearheading a drive among Saginaw firefighters to grant wishes for several families whose homes sustained fire damage in the past year.

"We try to pick some of the bigger families from the Wish List," Ceisla said.

"Last year we delivered the gifts by fire truck. Some of the kids were more excited about the fire truck than their gifts," she said.

After the phones line closes on Dec. 8, donors still may make contributions by calling the United Way at 755-0505, Ext. 203. v

Mary L. Lawrence is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9676.

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LOCAL COMMENT: No jackpots for Native Americans

BY DIANE KAWEGOMA

November 25, 2006

On a recent trip Up North, I overheard two men talking about American Indians who sit around, do nothing and receive free health care along with money from their casinos.

Being Native American and specifically from the tribe they were discussing, the Odawa tribe from the Petoskey region, I was dismayed and frustrated to realize so many people have the same stereotypical view.

I'm ashamed to say that I did not speak up for my tribe at the time. Although I missed that opportunity, I would now like to dispel the untruths that have circulated since Native Americans opened Michigan's first casino in 1993.

Contrary to the opinions of the men I encountered on my trip, I do not sit around doing nothing, raking in thousands of dollars a month from gambling proceeds and enjoying government-subsidized health care. I am hardworking and conscientious. I earn my living, having worked 40 hours a week at the same place for the last 19 years. I am not dependent on the government for any financial assistance and hope never to be.

My tribe does have a casino, Victories Casino in Petoskey. But it's not making me rich.

Each tribe associated with a casino decides how to distribute the money it earns from the casino. Some tribes elect to build affordable housing for members on the reservations, others pay for health care benefits for tribal members through a group insurance plan, and still other tribes pay a per-diem once a year, letting individual members decide how to spend the money they receive. Mine does an annual per diem, but this year, we're not even sure we're getting one because proceeds are going toward building a new casino.

None of those options makes us wealthy do-nothings. Even when the tribe provides affordable housing, members must pay the tribe back for the house, and they also must pay for their own utilities, food, clothing and gas for the car. We still need to earn a living, especially when the median household income based on a 1998-2000 average is \$31,799, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The casinos were supposed to be a business venture to further our tribes' independence, but they are fast becoming a curse because of the misconceptions and dependence they've fostered. Most of the population has decided we are living the privileged life. How can that image hold true when the Census Bureau reported in a 1998-2000 study that 25.9% of the Native American population was below poverty level? Visit almost any reservation in the United States and you'll wonder whether you've stepped into a Third World country.

Yet Native Americans are continually criticized for getting so-called government aid.

One of my sisters was laid off this year from the Detroit Public Schools Board of Education after 27 years of service. She immediately sought information about continuing health care coverage. But one of her union representatives told her not to worry because, as a Native American, she gets health care free. This seems to be a misconception many people share.

There are a few federally funded health care programs for Native Americans that provide only preventive care. This service does not include prescriptions, X-rays or emergency care, and the government is always trying to cut back on services or close health clinics.

Of course, there are other health programs for low-income people, regardless of race. But what happens to people like my sister, who earns too little to pay the bills but too much to be classified as poor by federal poverty level standards? According to the 1998-2000 U.S. Census, 4.1 million individuals identify themselves as Native American and 26.8% of those people lack health care coverage.

Native Americans strive to be self-sufficient, since we cannot depend on any treaty that was ever made in exchange for the land we once occupied. The government has broken promise after promise to our people.

We have little if no political representation in Washington to take up our fight. We seem to be the forgotten people. We have suffered in silence since our ancestors were forced to live on reservations situated on land that was thought to be uninhabitable. We adapted and survived, only to face the indignities that now come with Indian-owned casinos.



The Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort in the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Reservation near Mount Pleasant. (AL GOLDIS/Associated Press)

Enough is enough; the American public needs to realize that casinos are not making Native Americans millionaires. We are still struggling to reach the economic level that most Americans take for granted.

DIANE KAWEGOMA, 45, is of Mohawk and Odawa ancestry and lives in Detroit. She is a graduate of Wayne State University and works for Wayne County. Write to her in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 600 W. Fort St., Detroit 48226 or oped@freepress.com.

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Article published Nov 24, 2006
Sanilac looks at hotline for social services
County studies 2-1-1 access for people in need

By DANIELLE QUISENBERRY
Times Herald

The Sanilac County United Way and other agencies are working to change the way people find out about county social services.

The groups are trying to plug county residents into the 2-1-1 system - a three-digit access number for community information and referral services.

Instead of calling the Sanilac County Sheriff Department, the county department of human services or other county departments, people could dial the single, three-digit number for help, said Kent France, director of the Sanilac County United Way.

France and other community leaders met last week to discuss the plan.

By calling 2-1-1, a non-emergency equivalent of 9-1-1, people could find out, for example, where to go for help paying their rent, where to get legal advice and how to get involved in substance-abuse programs.

"A simple call would be wonderful," France said. "The problem isn't a lack of services. It's the lack of knowing where those services are."

France said a work group is forming to look into the feasibility of the project, which annually would cost about \$45,000, or \$1 per county resident he said. Local agencies would cover most of the cost.

There are nine 2-1-1 call centers that serve 66% of Michigan residents, said Sherry Miller, 2-1-1 director with the Michigan Association of United Ways.

By October 2007, the association hopes to have most counties plugged into the system.

The United Way of St. Clair County, which serves a county almost four times larger than Sanilac County, receives about 5,000 calls a year through a 24-hour, seven-day First Call for Help hot line, United Way Executive Director Lonnie Stevens said.

Port City Communication in Port Huron offers the United Way of St. Clair County a discount for the service, making it cost about \$1 per call.

The cost for the 2-1-1 service amounts to about \$11.49 per call, according to the business plan.

"It has not been affordable for us," Stevens said.

Hardiman Leads 'Kill Bill' Standings

MIRS, Wednesday, November 22, 2006

When Gov. Jennifer [GRANHOLM](#) quipped at Tuesday's press availability that she'd vetoed "almost everybody's" bills during her first four years in office, she was close (See "[Quote of the Day](#)," 11/21/06). She has turned back 108 policy-related bills since taking office in 2003, more than any Michigan governor in a four-year span since the 1963 Constitution.

Fifty-three current and former lawmakers have had their pieces of legislation bounced back to them, but the recipient of the most such letters, as of the Legislative Service Bureau's Public Act table through Sept. 21, may come as a surprise.

The soft-spoken Sen. Bill [HARDIMAN](#) (R-Grand Rapids) leads the veto standings with six policy-related bills killed in the last four years. Appropriations bills signed into law with line-item vetoes were not factored in this *MIRS* count.

Close behind were Sen. Cameron [BROWN](#) (R-Fawn River Twp.) and Sen. Alan [CROSEY](#) (R-DeWitt) with five a piece. Sen. Jason [ALLEN](#) and Senate Majority leader-elect Mike [BISHOP](#) (R-Rochester) each had four.

In total, 21 current and former Senators — 19 Republicans and two Democrats — have had bills vetoed. Only three Republicans — Senate Majority Leader Ken [SIKKEMA](#) (R-Wyoming), Sen. Mike [GOSCHKA](#) (R-Brant) and Sen. Ron [JELINEK](#) (R-Three Oaks) are not in the veto club. On the Democratic side, Sen. Jim [BARCIA](#) (D-Bay City) and former-Sen. Virg [BERNERO](#) (D-Lansing) are the only ones in it.

On the House side, 32 current and former members — 30 Republicans and two Democrats — have had their policy-related legislation returned to sender. The leader in the House is House Tax Policy Chair Fulton [SHEEN](#) (R-Plainwell) with four. Rep. Judy [EMMONS](#) (R-Sheridan), Jerry [KOOIMAN](#) (R-Grand Rapids) and Rep. John [STAKOE](#) (R-Highland) each over three. The only Democrats on the list are Rep. Paul [CONDINO](#) (D-Southgate) and former Rep. Bill [O'NEIL](#) of Allen Park.

Hardiman's standings-topping six vetoes appears to have had more to do with him signing on to legislative packages the Governor didn't like than trying to advance gubernatorial offense legislation solo.

His [SB 0892](#) of 2005 strengthened training and education requirements for welfare recipients, but was tie-barred with the House's 48-month lifetime limit bill, and was vetoed. He also had bills in the 2004 judicial restructuring package, which was spiked for not giving Wayne County more judges; a bill in a start-up business tax credit package; and a bill in the marriage/divorce reform package.

Hardiman's other two vetoed bills would have banned the administration from establishing administrative rules designed to benefit nursing homes that agree to collective bargaining ([SB 1026](#)) and allowed health maintenance organizations (HMOs) to establish more flexible health care plans ([SB 1150](#) of 2004).